The SELECTED POEMS of Lizette Woodworth Reese

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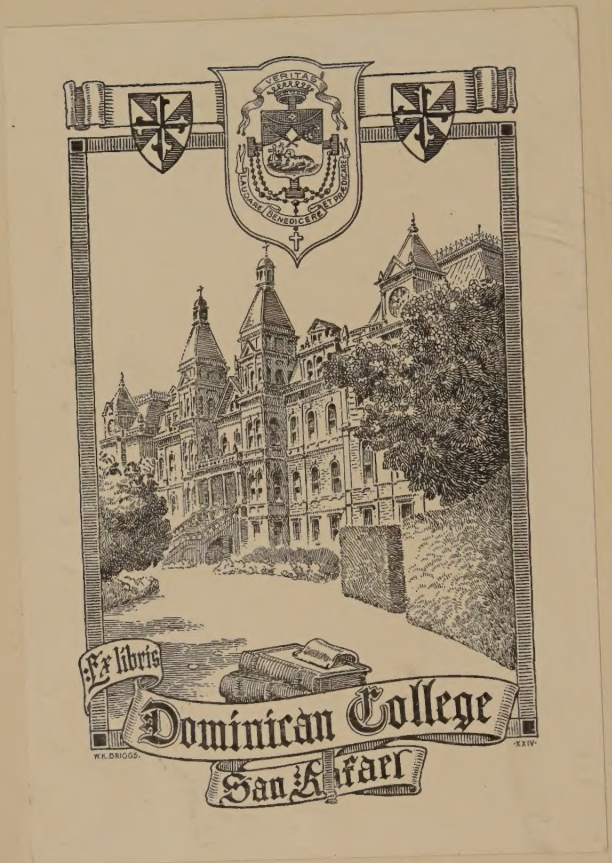

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The selected poems of
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The Selected Poems
of
LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE

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SPICEWOOD

WILD CHERRY

The Selected Poems

of

LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE 1856-19
Author of "A Branch of May," "A Handful of Lavender," "A Quiet Road," "A Wayside Lute," "Spicewood," "Wild Cherry"

NEW YORK
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SELECTED POEMS OF LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE
—B—
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TO THE MEMORY
OF
LAURA V. DE VALIN
and
ANNE CULLINGTON

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I

IN PRAISE OF COMMON THINGS

"To see a World in a grain of sand
And a Heaven in a wild flower . . ."

—BLAKE.

IN PRAISE OF COMMON THINGS

For stock and stone;
For grass, and pool; for quince tree blown
A virginal white in spring;
And for the wall beside,
Gray, gentle, wide;
For roof, loaf, everything,
I praise Thee, Lord;
For toil, and ache, and strife,
And all the commonness of life.

Hearty, yet dim,
Like country voices in a hymn,
The things a house can hold;
The memories in the air;
And down the stair
Fond footsteps known of old;
The chair, the book or two;
The little bowl of white and blue.

What would it be,
If loveliness were far from me?

A staff I could not take,
To hurry up and down,
From field to town;
Needs would my wild heart break;
Or, I would vacant go,
And, being naught, to nothing grow.

This is the best:
My little road from east to west,
The breadth of a man's hand,
Not from the sky too far,
Nor any star,
Runs through the unwalled land;
From common things that be,
Is but a step to run to Thee.

OLD AGE

This is the hour that just Life sends
  To make amends;
This closet space where Grief is not;
  The World forgot;
And far behind the once-trodden ways
  Enwrapped in haze;
  Here the soft weather fleets
Toward the sun-haunted regions of the West;
  And all about us beats—
As all about a wood stripped of its best,
  A still, prophetic thing—
  The Rumor of the Spring!

A STREET SCENE

The east is a clear violet mass
Behind the houses high;
The laborers with their kettles pass;
The carts are creaking by.

Carved out against the tender sky,
The convent gables lift;
Half way below the old boughs lie
Heaped in a great white drift.

They tremble in the passionate air;
They part, and clean and sweet
The cherry flakes fall here, fall there;
A handful stirs the street.

The workmen look up as they go;
And one, remembering plain
How white the Irish orchards blow,
Turns back, and looks again.

DOUBT

Creeds grow so thick along the way,
Their boughs hide God; I cannot pray.

TRUTH

The old faiths light their candles all about,
But burly Truth comes by and blows them out.

IN HARBOR

If hungry, Lord, I need but bread;
If I be faint, a cooling cup;
Naught, if I weary, save a bed;
If halt, a staff to hold me up;
If needy, fields to till:
Yet, Lord, I wait Thy will.

WILD GEESE

The sun blown out;
The dusk about:
Fence, roof, tree—here or there,
Wedged fast in the drab air;
A pool vacant with sky,
That stares up like an eye.

Nothing can happen. All is done—
The quest to fare,
The race to run—
The house sodden with years,
And bare
Even of tears.

A cry!
From out the hostelries of sky,
And down the gray wind blown;
Rude, innocent, alone.

Now, in the west, long sere,
An orange thread, the length of spear;

It glows;
It grows;
The flagons of the air
Drip color everywhere:
The village—fence, roof, tree—
From the lapsed dusk pulls free,
And shows
A rich, still, unforgotten place;
Each window square,
Yellow for yellow renders back;
The pool puts off its foolish face;
The wagon track
Crooks past lank garden-plot,
To Rome, to Camelot.

A cry!

SWEET WEATHER

Now blow the daffodils on slender stalks,
Small keen quick flames that leap up in the mold,
And run along the dripping garden-walks:
Swallows come whirring back to chimneys old.

Blown by the wind, the pear-tree's flakes of snow
Lie heaped in the thick grasses of the lane;
And all the sweetness of the Long Ago
Sounds in that song the thrush sends through the rain.

AFTER THE RAIN

Dripping the hollyhocks beneath the wall,
  Their fires half quenched, a smouldering red;
A shred of gold upon the grasses tall,
  A butterfly is hanging dead.

A sound of trickling waters, like a tune
  Set to sweet words; a wind that blows
Wet boughs against a saffron sky; all June
  Caught in the breath of one white rose.

APRIL WEATHER

Oh, hush, my heart, and take thine ease,
For here is April weather!
The daffodils beneath the trees
Are all a-row together.

The thrush is back with his old note;
The scarlet tulip blowing;
And white—ay, white as my love's throat—
The dogwood boughs are growing.

The lilac bush is sweet again;
Down every wind that passes,
Fly flakes from hedgerow and from lane;
The bees are in the grasses.

And Grief goes out, and Joy comes in,
And Care is but a feather;
And every lad his love can win,
For here is April weather.

IMMORTALITY

Battles nor songs can from oblivion save,
But Fame upon a white deed loves to build;
From out that cup of water Sidney gave,
Not one drop has been spilled.

HEROISM

Whether we climb, whether we plod,
Space for one task the scant years lend—
To choose some path that leads to God,
And keep it to the end.

THE SHADOW ON THE DIAL

God set the sun in the sky;
Out of the sun came I;
A shadow, yet I show
How long it takes a rose to grow.

HERBS

A serviceable thing
Is fennel, mint, or balm,
Kept in the thrifty calm
Of hollows, in the spring;
Or by old houses pent.
Dear is its ancient scent
To folk that love the days forgot,
Nor think that God is not.

Sage, lavender, and rue,
For body's hurt and ill,
For fever and for chill;
Rosemary, strange with dew,
For sorrow and its smart;
For breaking of the heart;
Yet pain, dearth, tears, all come to dust,
As even the herbs must.

Life-everlasting, too,
Windless, poignant, and sere,
That blows in the old year,
Townsmen, for me and you.

Why fret for wafting airs?
Why haste to sell our wares?
Captains and clerks, this shall befall;
This is the end of all.

Oh, this the end indeed!
Oh, unforgotten things,
Gone out of all the springs;
The quest, the dream, the creed!
Gone out of all the lands,
And yet safe in God's hands;—
For shall the dull herbs live again,
And not the sons of men?

THE COOL OF EVENING

The wind is low in air,
And shakes the box-tree bare
Of spice, long hoarded there;
Cut black against the orange sky,
Two neighbors hurry by.

The door's ajar. I see
The table set for me,
My mother in her chair
Ready to say the prayer.

In journeyings to and fro
Our poor wild lives do go—
Then wind, scent, flare of sky,
The cool of evening nigh;
Roof, loaf, the fond word said—
Then afterward to bed.

THE DUST

The dust blows up and down
Within the lonely town;
Vague, hurrying, dumb, aloof,
On sill and bough and roof.

What cloudy shapes do fleet
Along the parchèd street;
Clerks, bishops, kings go by—
To-morrow so shall I!

OH, GRAY AND TENDER IS THE RAIN

Oh, gray and tender is the rain,
That drips, drips on the pane!
A hundred things come in the door,
The scent of herbs, the thought of yore.

I see the pool out in the grass,
A bit of broken glass;
The red flags running wet and straight,
Down to the little flapping gate.

Lombardy poplars tall and three,
Across the road I see;
There is no loveliness so plain
As a tall poplar in the rain.

But oh, the hundred things and more,
That come in at the door!—
The smack of mint, old joy, old pain,
Caught in the gray and tender rain.

AFTER

Oh, the littles that remain!
Scent of mint out in the lane;
Flare of window; sound of bees;—
These, but these.

Three times sitting down to bread;
One time climbing up to bed;
Table-setting over and o'er;
Drying herbs for winter's store;
This thing; that thing;—nothing more.

But just now out in the lane,
Oh, the scent of mint was plain!

INSPIRATION

Upon the hills I left my sheep;
  Shepherd no more was I,
With staff and scrip a watch to keep;
  My flocks were of the sky.

I ran down to the river-reeds;
  I set the foremost loose;
I made it ready for my needs,
  And sweet enough for use.

The rude East smote me where I stood;
  The stars were great and few;
Sudden, along the expectant wood,
  A wavering note I blew.

Fog wrapped me in a winding-sheet;
  Nor sky nor road was clear;
I blew a note so echoing sweet
  The night rose up to hear.

The kine came from the pastures chill;
  The flock came from the fold;
By tavern-sides the folks sat still;
  The dead stirred in the mold.

Ere yet the dark was at its close,
  Quaking I blew once more;
The silence petaled like a rose,
  And all my song was o'er.

Myriad and golden past the wood,
  The spears of morn grew plain;
Empty within the light I stood
  And broke my reed in twain.

GROWTH

I climb that was a clod;
  I run whose steps were slow;
I reap the very wheat of God
  That once had none to sow.

Is Joy a lamp outblown?
  Truth out of grasping set?
But nay, for Laughter is mine own;
  I knock and answer get.

Nor is the last word said;
  Nor is the battle done;
Somewhat of glory and of dread
  Remains for set of sun.

For I have scattered seed
  Shall ripen at the end;
Old Age holds more than I shall need,
  Death more than I can spend.

WRITTEN IN A BOOK OF ELIZABETHAN VERSE

Oncoming Hour of light and dew,
Of heartier sun, more certain blue,
My shadow on your face doth fall.
I am the first sweet thing of all;
By that much the more sweet than you.

Mine is the crocus and the call
Of gust to gust in shrubberies tall;
The white tumult, the rainy hush;
And mine the unforgetting thrush
That pours its heart-break from the wall.

For I am Tears, for I am Spring,
The old and immemorial thing;
To me come ghosts by twos and threes,
Under the swaying cherry-trees,
From east and west remembering.

O elder Hour, when I am not,
Gone out like smoke from road and plot,
More perfect Hour of light and dew,
Shall lovers turn away from you,
And long for me, the Unforgot!

A BELATED ROSE

The sheaves are gathered in;
The apple-bough is bare;
Whence comes it, lone and rare,
Into this empty air,
Now fast are barn and bin?

What furrow long forgot
Sets here its honeyed sign?
What old seed turns divine?—
Honey enough is mine;
And so I gather not.

The day draws to its close,
The long day and the sore;
And I—I reap no more;
Though at my very door
The harvest is a rose!

RESERVE

Keep back the one word more,
Nor give of your whole store;
For, it may be, in Art's sole hour of need,
Lacking that word, you shall be poor indeed.

A GOOD DEED

A good deed knows nor age nor winding-sheet,
The centuries find and leave it quick and sweet;
Even the miser is remembered
By that one time he gave the beggar bread.

LORD, OFT I COME

Lord, oft I come unto Thy door,
  But when Thou openest it to me,
Back to the dark I shrink once more,
  Away from light and Thee.

Lord, oft some gift of Thee I pray;
  Thou givest bread of finest wheat;
Empty I turn upon my way,
  Counting a stone more sweet.

Thou biddest me speed; then sit I still;
  Thou biddest me stay; then do I go;
Lord, make me Thine in deed and will,
  And ever keep me so!

AFTER DISASTER

Who hurts his heel upon a stone;
Knows that some trick of life is done;
No longer his the rage to do,
The rush across the hurrying sun.

Such thrift he shows with his new hours
That he spares one, to stoop his head
To some grey book he read with her
Who loved him long since. She is dead.

Lovely, secure, unhastening things
Fast-kept for this, grip as of yore;—
The drowsy traffic of the bees;
The scarlet haws beyond a door.

WET GRASS

Tinges Corner dripped and sighed,
Clear silver in the sun,
And thin with music, like a song
Whose singing is half done.

As he and I came up that way,
Through the silver air,
The smell of wet grass hurt us so,
That we fell silent there.

Before we knew it, each from each,
Had moved a space apart,
Our eyes upon the drenched thin road,
Each with a prick at heart.

For he remembered all at once,
A woman, who was dead;
I, a dead lad. It was too much.
And not a word was said.

II

ROMANCE

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on."

—SHAKESPEARE.

THE LAST LOVER

It is so late! Down all our days are set
  November and the snows;
Yet now, when we are ready to forget,
  For both has blown a rose.

Right well we know nor you nor I can make
  A blaze of one lean spark;
And it were all in vain for us to take
  This candle to the dark.

Now what, in truth, the fitting word to say,
  And what the proper fate,
For growing red on a November day,
  For being a rose so late?

Oh, must we pluck it, sweet though come to dust,
  A moment hold it fast?
Or leave it to the gathering of the gust?—
  A rose, but at the last!

AN APRIL GHOST

All the ghosts I ever knew,
  White, and thinly calling,
Come into the house with you
  When the dew is falling.

All of youth that ever died,
  In the Springtime weather,
In the windy April tide,
  Climb the dusk together.

For a moment, lad and maid
  Stand up there all lonely;
In a moment fade and fade—
  You are left, you only.

DEATH'S GUERDON

Secure in death he keeps the hearts he had;
Two women have forgotten the bitter truth;
To one he is but her sweet little lad;
To one the husband of her youth.

A CELTIC MAYING SONG

Seven candles burn at my love's head,
Seven candles at his feet;
He lies as he were carved of stone
Under the winding-sheet.

The Mayers troop into the town
Each with a branch of May,
But when they come to my love's house
Not one word do they say.

But when they come to my love's house,
Silent they stand before;
Out steps a lad with one white bough,
And lays it at the door.

TRUST

I am Thy grass, O Lord!
  I grow up sweet and tall
But for a day; beneath Thy sword
  To lie at evenfall.

Yet have I not enough
  In that brief day of mine?
The wind, the bees, the wholesome stuff
  The sun pours out like wine.

Behold, this is my crown;
  Love will not let me be;
Love holds me here; Love cuts me down;
  And it is well with me.

Lord, Love, keep it but so;
  Thy purpose is full plain;
I die that after I may grow
  As tall, as sweet again.

WAITING FOR SONG

All my roads climb to you, and my whole year
To days elect and few,
Thrust toward the spring-time, in an atmosphere
Sifted of frost or dew;
Shut to Remembrance, Song, away from you.

More than Remembrance; Expectation here,
Beside that other set,
Waits in this tender season. Draw you near
Swift as the violet?
God answers me with you: I have you yet.

At root of crocus; at the heart of tree;
And in the shower's drip;
Fleeting like wind the hollow dusks for me;
Back to my best I slip,
Remembering you: I run, but you outstrip.

Grown used to Spring, oh, I shall understand;
No strange thing will it be,
To watch it surge in billows up the land!
Grown used to you, to see
You rising up, come back from God to me!

THE VALENTINE

Against this thorny Present shows
  Your memory like the dew;
Each maid a wrinkled Beauty goes,
  When I do think of you.

Folded away in the deep grass,
  What is it can befall?
Nor Clouds that fade, nor Gusts that pass,
  Nor any Grief at all.

Now lovers write their verses brave;
  Now buds start on the tree;
But Love went with you to the grave,
  The sere leaf bides with me.

I have not any word save this;
  My tears are all my store;
The fairer that the weather is
  I miss you but the more.

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth, alack, Elizabeth!
Your lovely lilies blow,
Slim, love, still, love, beside the echoing stair.
The bees have found them out. Row after row
Your pinks, those little blossoms with a breath
Blown from the east, and out the spice-trees there,
Nod up the paths; and roses white as death,
And roses red as love, grow everywhere;
For June is at the door.
Alack, alack, alack, Elizabeth!
Sweeter than June, why do you come no more?

THAT DAY YOU CAME

Such special sweetness was about
That day God sent you here,
I knew the lavender was out,
And it was mid of year.

Their common way the great winds blew,
The ships sailed out to sea;
Yet ere that day was spent I knew
Mine own had come to me.

As after song some snatch of tune
Lurks still in grass or bough,
So, somewhat of the end of June
Lurks in each weather now.

The young year sets the buds astir,
The old year strips the trees;
But ever in my lavender
I hear the brawling bees.

A RHYME OF DEATH'S INN

A Rhyme of good Death's inn!
  My love came to that door;
And she had need of many things,
  The way had been so sore.

My love she lifted up her head,
  "And is there room?" said she;
"There was no room in Bethlehem's inn
  For Christ who died for me."

But said the keeper of the inn,
  "His name is on the door."
My love then straightway entered there:
  She hath come back no more.

A SONG

O Love, he went a-straying,
A long time ago!
I missed him in the Maying,
When blossoms were of snow;
So back I came by the old sweet way;
And for I loved him so,
I wept that he came not with me,
A long time ago!

Wide open stood my chamber door,
And one stepped forth to greet;
Gray Grief, strange Grief, who turned me sore
With words he spake so sweet.
I gave him meat, I gave him drink;
(And listened for Love's feet).
How many years? I cannot think;
In truth, I do not know—
A long time ago.

O Love, he came not back again,
  Although I kept me fair;
And each white May, in field and lane,
  I waited for him there!
Yea, he forgot; but Grief stayed on,
  And in Love's empty chair
Doth sit and tell of days long gone—
  'Tis more than I can bear.

BETRAYED

She is false, O Death, she is fair!
  Let me hide my head on thy knee;
Blind mine eyes, dull mine ears, O Death!
  She hath broken my heart for me!

Give me a perfect dream;
  Find me a rare, dim place;
But let not her voice come nigh,
  And keep out her face—her face!

LOVE CAME BACK AT FALL OF DEW

Love came back at fall of dew,
Playing his old part;
But I had a word or two
That would break his heart.

"He who comes at candle-light,
That should come before,
Must betake him to the night
From a barrèd door."

This the word that made us part
In the fall of dew;
This the word that broke his heart—
Yet it broke mine, too!

A PASTORAL

Oho, my love, oho, my love, and ho, the bough
that shows,
Against the grayness of mid-Lent the color of the
rose!
The lights of Spring are in the sky and down
among the grass;
Bend low, bend low, ye Kentish reeds, and let two
lovers pass!

The plum-tree is a straitened thing; the cherry is
but vain;
The thorn but black and empty at the turning of
the lane;
Yet mile by mile out in the wind the peach-trees
blow and blow,
And which is stem, and which is bloom, not any
maid can know.

The ghostly ships sail up to town and past the
orchard wall;
There is a leaping in the reeds; they waver and
they fall;

For lo, the gusts of God are out; the April time is
brief;
The country is a pale red rose, and dropping leaf
by leaf.

I do but keep me close beside, and hold my lover's
hand;
Along the narrow track we pass across the level
land;
The petals whirl about us and the sedge is to our
knees;
The ghostly ships sail up, sail up, beyond the strip-
ping trees.

When we are old, when we are cold, and barrèd
is the door,
The memory of this will come and turn us young
once more;
The lights of Spring will dim the grass and trem-
ble from the sky;
And all the Kentish reeds bend low to let us two
go by!

ALL-SAINTS' EVE

Oh, when the ghosts go by,
  Under the empty trees,
Here in my house I sit and cry,
  My head upon my knees!

Innumerable, white,
  Like mist they fill the square;
The bolt is drawn, the latch made tight,
  The shutter barrèd there.

There walks one small and glad,
  New to the churchyard clod;
My little lad, my little lad,
  A single year with God!

I sit and hide my head
  Until they all are past,
Under the empty trees the dead
  That go full soft and fast.

Up to my chamber dim,
  Back to my bed I plod;
Oh, would I were a ghost with him,
  And faring back to God!

WAITING.

They swear the dead come back at night,
Who once were women and men,
And sob and cry in the strange weather,
To be let in again.

Out by the straggling thorn I wait,
But you are not come yet;
So it must be that I remember,
And that you forget.

III

SONNETS

"*Scorn not the sonnet.*"

—WORDSWORTH.

THE THOUGHT OF YOU

Before, behind me is the thought of you.
I cannot shake it off like dust, or scent
Of apples brought in from the August dew.
It clings to me, and marks me different
From folk who never think of you at all;
Who talk of showers, of wrecked kings, of books,
The cost of bricks, of their girls growing tall.
Thus I go wisely, and with strange, cool looks,
Unready for trite things, like a mean air,
Or sour, small deeds. I flaunt not to the face
Of these impoverished folk the wealth I hold,
The wealth is you, incredible, too fair,
Enough to haven me in any place,
Keep me in Aprils, and from turning cold.

TOO LATE

I had not measured you by any height,
Plumbed you by any depth, forgotten my bread
For you. And not one word had there been said
To make your strangeness less strange in my sight.
Your height was that of suns; your depth, their
flame;
I had not thought a lover would be so,
Like far, warm, troubled music. Could I know
That I would long too late to be the same?
Or know, as I know that a flower is blue,
The stopping of that music was a part
Of love's hereditary hurt and smart?
That you would last, as sudden and as new,
So lodged in every crevice of my heart,
I could not dispossess myself of you?

EARLY SEPTEMBER

The swallows have not left us yet, praise God!
And bees still hum, and gardens hold the musk
Of white rose and of red; firing the dusk
By the old wall, the hollyhocks do nod,
And pinks that send the sweet East down the wind.
And yet, a yellowing leaf shows here and there
Among the boughs, and through the smoky air—
That hints the frost at dawn—the wood looks
thinned.
The little half-grown sumachs, all as green
As June last week, now in the crackling sedge,
Colored like wine burn to the water's edge.
We feel, at times, as we had come unseen
Upon the aging Year, sitting apart,
Grief in his eyes, some ache at his great heart.

RETICENCE

I will not say a word to let them know
I know you dead. Not any word at all,
Except a strained pale one of thus and so—
Some path we loved, some flower at a wall.
And if folk notice this, as folk may do,
Then they will say: "She is too busy now,
Or else too light, or else grief is so new,
No more than the vague brushing of a bough."
I will not let them know that you are dead,
But set my looks by theirs, and toil and try
To make my every speech gleam like a star,
Or wrap each word in gilt to hide its lead.
They shall not know how stripped a thing am I,
Unroofed, unharbored, clinging to a spar!

ONE SPRING DAY

I think that God, out of his carefulness,
Made me this weather for my comforting;
This flame of white and silver, and no less
This resolute gold down one day's length in spring.
Some old, lost gable trembles to the sky
And then is done. House, highway to the rim
Are full of footsteps going briefly by;
Beyond the hedge a voice, a face too dim!
So, being comforted, I understand
This sense about me of some Other Where;
The cowslips yonder are mine but in part;
Some tender ghost puts out a sudden hand;
With cherubim and seraphim I share;
God made this weather for my breaking heart.

HER SON

The narrow trees down her lane in a row,
That look so black and then so gusty white,
She hates the old and foolish way they grow;
Just now they hid him all too soon from sight.
But back into the house she needs must go,
To spread the board, prepare the meal aright,
The savory things that little lads love so—
Round cakes, spiced meat, and apples red and bright.
Oh, dreams, but dreams! And oh, a sweet one, too,
That yesterday, until too dark to see,
She fashioned a small garment for her lad—
That shadowy garment, with its sprig of blue;—
For long and long a barren mother she;
And this the little son she never had!

KEATS

An English lad, who, reading in a book,
A ponderous, leathern thing set on his knee,
Saw the broad violet of the Ægean Sea
Lap at his feet as it were village brook.
Wide was the east; the gusts of morning shook;
Immortal laughter beat along that shore;
Pan crouching in the reeds, piped as of yore;
The gods came down and thundered from that book.
He lifted his sad eyes; his London street
Swarmed in the sun and strove to make him heed;
Boys spun their tops, shouting and fair of cheek:
But still, that violet lapping at his feet,—
An English lad had he sat down to read;
But he rose up and knew himself a Greek.

RECOMPENSE

Sometimes, yea, often, I forget, forget;
Pass your closed door with not a thought of you,
Of the old days, but only of these new;
I sow; I reap; my house in order set.
Then of a sudden doth this thing befall,
By a wood's edge, or in the market-place,
That I remember naught but your dead face,
And other folk forgotten, you are all.
When this is so, oh, sooth the time and sweet!—
And I, thereafter, am like unto one
Who from the lilac bloom and the young year
Comes to a chamber shuttered from the street,
Yet heeds nor emptiness nor lack of sun,
For that the recompensing Spring is near!

HERRICK

Oh, Herrick, still we love you, and our days
Keep to the weather of the daffodil,
Because, good Mayer, your few notes do still
Break with their silver down our sullen ways.
Last of your line that knew clearly to sing,
You kept your heart up to the bloomy time,
Spending your Devon in unvexèd rhyme,
And with no mood except that one of Spring.
Oh, still we come,—as to some fair estate,
Which should be theirs, yet somehow is not so,
Come poor and wistful heirs from overseas,
To long and look without the fast-barred gate—
And track you by your laughter where you go
At thick of morn under the rectory trees!

CHARLES LAMB

Lover of London, not a violet
Purpled at a shop-door the end of Lent,
But thought he higher than all its kind in Kent;
And if the door were carved—then better yet!
Elizabethan laughter fills his time;
He heard it echoing and made it his;
And with its smacking words for that or this,
He set to prose what others saved for rhyme.
Past cheat of years the comrades of his mood—
The quiet old men sitting in the sun;
Strict maids; gray clerks; and children fair and blest;
And that sad woman of his house and blood—
And still he hides his hurts from dearest one;
But with the whole world shares the stingless jest!

THE STUBBLE

Is this sad void all that is left of Spring,
Of fire and dream, of quick and delicate days?
And must all they who pass along these ways,
Come to this silence of remembering?
I, too, in the young year have had a part;
Once was it hard to doubt as hard to grieve;
So easy once, so easy to believe!—
Now all my harvest is a troubled heart.
Yet has not doubt its place, and so its right?
Its dreams and visions, faint but unforgot?
Its longing mood whence breaks some sure, glad
thing,
Higher than shrine, or star, or evenlight?
Lord of the stubble, though I see Thee not,
About me sounds the Rumor of the Spring!

A WET JUNE DAY

Scents, sounds as of November fill the air;
Of myriad blossoms down wet pathways strown,
Of ragged leaves off steaming branches blown
And dropped into dank hollows here and there.
Keen little gusts go whirling through the hush,
Driving the mist before them up the lane.
And lo, the lovely world grows ours again!
The orchard fences, the one elder bush,
Prone with its white face in the thick drenched
grass,
The rows of apple trees, gnarled, dripping, sweet,
The highway with its pools agleam like glass;
Then, as still speeds the mist on shining feet,
Meadow, and wood, peaked roofs—beyond them
shows
A windy west, the color of a rose.

THE UNFORGOTTEN THINGS

What are the unforgotten things, my heart?
In what guise do they come, in what strange way
Knock at the door, and enter in and stay,
Of our small hour the near, the poignant part?—
A sound, an odor, trick of sun and air;
Left from a song the little, sobbing note;
The yellow of a flower quick at the throat—
Of all our years, of all our tears a share.
No need for quest—they are forever nigh;
Out of the night, out of the noon they start;
Their steps do follow, follow through the grass;
Their hands touch ours, and eye looks into eye;
Outlasting years and tears, my heart, my heart!—
Broken into dust their ancient lovers pass.

TEARS

When I consider Life and its few years—
A wisp of fog betwixt us and the sun;
A call to battle, and the battle done
Ere the last echo dies within our ears;
A rose choked in the grass; an hour of fears;
The gusts that past a darkening shore do beat;
The burst of music down an unlistening street—
I wonder at the idleness of tears.
Ye old, old dead, and ye of yesternight,
Chieftains, and bards, and keepers of the sheep,
By every cup of sorrow that you had,
Loose me from tears, and make me see aright
How each hath back what once he stayed to weep;
Homer his sight, David his little lad!

SPICEWOOD

The spicewood burns along the gray, spent sky,
In moist, unchimneyed places, in a wind,
That whips it all before, and all behind,
Into one thick, rude flame, now low, now high.
It is the first, the homeliest thing of all—
At sight of it, the lad that by it fares,
Whistles afresh his foolish town-caught airs—
A thing so honey-colored and so tall!
It is as though the young Year, ere he pass,
To the white riot of the cherry tree,
Would fain accustom us, or here, or there,
To his new sudden ways with bough and grass,
So starts with what is humble, plain to see,
And all familiar as a cup, a chair.

A CHESAPEAKE MARSH

Willows and willows in two gust-worn rows,
The fading sunset and the marsh between;
A road beneath where little pools lie keen
At twisted roots, and faint the late light glows.
The yellowing leaves flame down each wind that blows,
And choke the pools and heap the rushes lean.
Wheels rumble; up the road a cart is seen;
White in a whirl of dust it lumbering shows.
Eastward, beyond the wall of gust-worn trees,
A rotting boat drawn up among the reeds;
Creeks that past foggy alders blazing slip;
Salt scents; the stir of solitary bees;
A startled bird that shoreward clamoring speeds;
And leagues of water empty of a ship.

TELL ME SOME WAY

Oh, you who love me not, tell me some way
Whereby I may forget you for a space;
Nay, clean forget you and your lovely face—
Yet well I know how vain this prayer I pray.
All weathers hold you. Can I make the May
Forbid her boughs blow white in every place?
Or rob June of her rose that comes apace?
Cheat of their charm the elder months and gray?
Aye, were you dead, you could not be forgot:
So sparse the bloom along the lanes would be;
Such sweetness out the briery hedges fled;
My tears would fall that you had loved me not,
And bitterer tears that you had gone from me;
Living, you break my heart, so would you dead!

LOVE, WEEPING, LAID THIS SONG

(On a copy of the Iliad found with the mummy of a young girl)

Lo! an old song, yellow with centuries!
  She, she who with her young dust kept it sweet;
  She, in some green court on a carvèd seat,
Read it at dusk fair-paged upon her knees;
And, looking up, saw there, beyond the trees,
  Tall Helen through the darkling shadows fleet;
  And heard, out in the fading river-street,
The roar of battle like the roar of seas.
Love, weeping, laid this song when she was dead
  In that sealed chamber, strange with nard and musk.
    Outliving Egypt, see it here at last.
We touch its leaves: back rush the seasons sped;
  For us, as once for her, in that old dusk,
    Troy trembles like a reed before the blast!

A SONG OF SEPARATION

The long stripped days, the nights void of a kiss,
The streets wherein not any step I take
Brings sound or sight of you, though my heart
break,
Yea, the round year—were not my trouble this,
It would be yours, belovèd; one must miss
Honey for gall, and one go unbereft;
One must be taken and the other left;
I praise God that my bitter is your bliss.
Out of this thought, as out some reed apace,
I draw a faltering music for relief,
Yet sweet enough to make, from door to door,
My empty house a habitable place.
My tears break off: I will have naught of grief,
For I remember you do weep no more.

A SONG OF DAFFODILS

Fathered by March, the daffodils are here.
First, all the air grew keen with yesterday,
And once a thrush from out some hollow gray
On a field's edge, where whitening stalks made cheer,
Fluted the last unto the budding year;
Now, that the wind lets loose from orchard spray
Plum bloom and peach bloom down the dripping way,
Their punctual gold through the wet blades they rear.
Oh, fleet and sweet! A light to all that pass:
Below, in the cramped yard, close to the street,
Long-stemmed one flames behind the palings bare,
The whole of April in a tuft of grass.
Scarce here, soon will it be—oh, sweet and fleet!—
Gone like a snatch of song upon the stair.

A NOVEMBER AFTERNOON

The long and sad week's wind, like any child,
  Has sobbed itself to sleep. This morning's rain
Has strewn the stairway with the petals wild,
Red, ragged, of my sweet last rose. The lane
Shows me the poplar tree, blackened and bare,
Clasped to its heart a dangling empty nest.
A few dull yellow leaves stir here and there,
And all the air is clear from east to west.
The year, I think, lies dreaming of the May,
As old men dream of youth, that loved lost thing,
A spring-like thrill is in this weather gray.
I wait to hear some thrush begin to sing;
And half expect, as up and down I go,
To see my neighbor's cherry-boughs in blow!

RENUNCIATION

Loose hands and part: I am not she you sought,
  The fair one whom in all your dreams you see,
  But something more of earth and less than she,
That crowded her an instant from your thought.
Blameless we face the fate this hour has brought.
  Unwitting I took hers; I set you free
  From all that you unwitting gave to me;
Seek her and find her; I do grudge her naught.
Love, after daylight, dark; so there is left
  This season stripped of you; but yet I know,
    Remembering the old, I cannot make
These new days bitter or myself bereft.
  I know, O love, that I do love you so,
    While peace is yours my true heart cannot break!

BEFORE THE RAIN

The poplar shows its white teeth to the gust
  Driven out the east and up the still highway;
The alders bow like reeds. A cloud of dust
  Whirls by, and with it scents from hollows gray,
Scents from a hundred fields, the petals fair
  Of blossoming brambles by the fence a-row.
The wind passes, and lo, each bush is bare!
  There at the gate, the one rose late agrow
Lies in the path, a little quaking heap
  Of crimson leaves. The lily there is now
A little snow blown through the grasses deep.
  Light airs and gentle sounds haunt blade and
    bough;
Then, in the silence following again,
Fall sudden-sweet great drops of silver rain.

THE DAY BEFORE SPRING

There is a faltering crimson by the wall,
  Now on a vine, and now on briar thinned,
  As though one bearing lantern through the wind,
Here hides his light, but yonder lets it fall.
And we remember and remember; all
  Ancestral stirrings point unto this fate,—
  That we shall come unto our old estate,
Defrauding days unloose their iron thrall.
Without, the trees seem crowding to the street,
  Like simple folk that breathless here and there
    Crowd toward a haunted space, to verify
Some dim report of ghost or vision fleet;
  And lo, at dusk, across the silent square,
    As in a whirl of bloom, a Shape goes by!

THE LOOK OF THE HEDGE

I wonder if you know—you who are gone
So long that you have grown a mystery—
How Grief at first is such a verity,
He holds us fast from iron dawn to dawn;
Then, slackening his grasp, he lets us go,
Bearing some littleness of his old mood,
Some odor, sound, some look of fold or wood,—
You that are gone, I wonder if you know.
This day the hedge was loosing its spent white;
It stung me as with tears. What thing forgot,
Mixed with this custom of the countryside,
Had happened at some breaking of the light?
The bared briar was remembered—but not
This was the very weather that you died!

IV

POETS AND PEOPLE

"They only sing who are struck dumb by God."

—JOYCE KILMER.

TO A TOWN POET

Snatch the departing mood;
Make yours its emptying reed, and pipe us still
Faith in the time, faith in our common blood,
Faith in the least of good;
Song cannot fail if these its spirit fill!

What if your heritage be
The huddled trees along the smoky ways;
At a street's end the stretch of lilac sea;
The vender, swart but free,
Crying his yellow wares across the haze?

Your verse awaits you there;
For Love is Love though Latin swords be rust;
The keen Greek driven from gossiping mall and square;
And Care is still but Care
Though Homer and his seven towns are dust.

Thus Beauty lasts, and, lo!
Now Proserpine is barred from Enna's hills,
The flower she plucked yet makes an April show,
Sets some town sill a-glow,
And yours the Vision of the Daffodils.

The Old-World folk knew not
More surge-like sounds than urban winters bring
Up from the wharves at dusk to every spot;
And no Sicilian plot
More fire than heaps our tulips in the Spring.

Strait is the road of Song,
And they that be the last are oft the first;
Fret not for fame; the years are kind though long;
You, in the teasing throng,
May take all time with one shrewd lyric burst.

Be reverent to each call;
Ill shall not last, or waste the ploughèd land;
Or creeds sting timid souls; and naught at all,
Whatever else befall,
Can keep us from the hollow of God's hand.

Let trick of words be past;
Strict with the thought, unfearful of the form,
So shall you find the way and hold it fast,
The world hear, at the last,
The horns of morning sound above the storm.

THE LAVENDER WOMAN

(A Market Song)

Crooked, like bough the March wind bends wall-
ward across the sleet,
Stands she at her blackened stall in the loud mar-
ket street;
All about her in the sun, full-topped, exceeding
sweet,
Lie bundles of gray lavender, a-shrivel in the heat.

What the Vision that is mine, coming over and o'er?
Of the Dorset [1] levels, aye, behind me and before;
Creeks that slip without a sound from flaggy shore
to shore;
Orchards gnarled with spring-times and as gust-
bound as of yore.

Oh, the panes at sunset burning rich-red as the rose!
Oh, colonial chimneys that the punctual swallow
knows!

[1] Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Land where like a memory the salt scent stays or goes;
Where wealthy is the reaper and right glad is he that sows!

Drips and drips the last June rain, but toward the evenfall
Copper gleam the little pools behind the pear-trees tall;
In a whirl of violet, and the fairest thing of all,
The lavender, the lavender sways by the sagging wall!

. . . . .

Fade the levels, the sea-scent, the sheltered garden space;
Town roars all about me, and its roofs are here apace;
Country-sick, with heavy step my homeward road I trace,
Bearing the keen stuff I bought in the loud market-place.

Oh, my heart, why should you break at any thoughts like these?
So sooth are they of the old time that they should bring you ease;

Of Hester in the lavender and out among the bees,
Clipping the long stalks one by one under the Dorset trees.

HESTER

My sprightly neighbor.—CHARLES LAMB.

Dimpled of cheek and grave of gown,
A maid of whom this world has dearth,
She walks the streets of that old town,
And makes them mellow with her mirth.

The hoary roofs grow young with cheer,
The windows brighten pane by pane;
And haunted by her laughter dear,
To bud the shriveled boughs are fain.

The painted ladies of the age,
Flaunt past her oversweet with musk;
But she trips on with scent of sage
Blown out some yard at fall of dusk.

These painted dames of Hester's time—
When they are laid by churchyard doors,
She will laugh on in English rhyme,
And she be known on alien shores.

FRA GREGORY'S WORD TO THE LORD

My years in this green close are set;
  The mint buds lilac row by row;
Thy suns blaze on; Thy showers wet;
  And I rejoice that it is so.

Each stalk of lavender is sweet;
  As I fare back from ailing men,
I smell it out there in the street,
  And praise Thee I am home again.

Lord, in the shop at Nazareth,
  Was not the scent of cedar Thine,
Mixed with Thy work a country breath,
  As is this lavender with mine?

Ever the while I sow or reap,
  My sick folk seem about me, Lord,
As were I shepherd, they the sheep;
  Their cares smite through me like a sword.

Fra Simon has a lovely book,
  On rainy days he comes to me,
Over the painted leaves to crook,
  And therefrom read some word of Thee.

Fra Simon wrought this book himself;
  Luke with his viol breaks my heart;
A few dried simples on a shelf
  Are all my song, and all mine art.

I sort them out on floor and sill;
  Fennel, and balm, and silver sage;
This one for fever, this for chill;
  And, loving each, I get my wage.

Do such as I to glory pass,
  Skilled but in what each season grows?
I, gatherer of the convent grass,
  With smell of mold about my clothes?

I cannot sing; I scarce can pray;
  Let me have there some garden space,
Where I may dig in mine old way,
  And, looking up, Lord, see Thy face.

THE SHEPHERD

Across the Park, at set of sun,
The shepherd drives his sheep;
The little lambs that scarce can run
But by their mothers keep.

The town roars on without the gate;
There comes a wavering gust
Of children's laughter, and the grate
Of wheels along the dust.

A figure scriptural and kind,
Cut out against the brass
That deepens in the west behind,
He follows through the grass.

He gives a Syrian look to things,
From highest unto least;
To sky, to beechen bough, there clings
A flavor of the East.

With hurrying noises close but light
Straight to the fold they keep;
A pastoral spread before our sight,
A shepherd and his sheep.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

In his old gusty garden of the North,
He heard lark-time the uplifting Voices call;
Smitten through with Voices was the evenfall—
At last they drove him forth.

Now there were two rang silverly and long;
And of Romance, that spirit of the sun,
And of Romance, spirit of youth, was one;
And one was that of Song.

Gold-belted sailors, bristling buccaneers,
The flashing soldier, and the high, slim dame,
These were the Shapes that all around him came,—
That we let go with tears.

His was the unstinted English of the Scot,
Clear, nimble, with the scriptural tang of Knox
Thrust through it like the far, strict scent of box,
To keep it unforgot.

No frugal Realist, but quick to laugh,
To see appealing things in all he knew,
He plucked the sun-sweet corn his fathers grew,
And would have naught of chaff.

David and Keats, and all good singing men,
Take to your hearts this Covenanter's son,
Gone in mid-years, leaving our years undone,
Where you do sing again!

AN ENGLISH MISSAL

Upon these pages clear,
I, Basil, write my name;
My task is ended, and the year
Is gone out like a flame.

Martin and John the good
Are gathered to the blest;
It seems an hour ago they stood
And praised me with the rest.

I missed them when they went;
Then filled this page with palms,
And saw them both—their travail spent—
Harbored in heavenly calms.

The tulips in this book,
Their like our garden knew;
All spring what could I do but look,
And set them here anew?

The saint that yonder walks
Smiles from our chancel space;
But Mary with the lily-stalks
Has mine own mother's face.

The thought of her was sweet
As blossoms are in Lent;
Green turned our winding convent street,
And all about was Kent.

Kent lilies round her nod;
I drew her staid and fair;
I drew her with the Son of God
Clasped to her bosom there.

Brief is our life and dark;
The grave shall hold us fast;
Yet find I here in Old Saint Mark
That only right shall last.

I, Basil, too, must heed,
Else were my task undone.
God has more books than I can read;
I praise Him for this one.

THE HERETICS

Now, who are these out in the night,
  Blown naked in the worrying gust?
Gray mist across your candlelight,
  Mean shapes along the unresting dust?

These are the Hunted Ones you see,
  Who tireless speed from land to land;
Freemen who would that you were free;
  Hark to the Hunters close at hand!

A halt, a call, an edgèd cry—
  But not a foot stirs on the floor;
"Follow and dream; follow and die!"—
  Untouched the latch upon the door.

Mean shapes from all the dark apart,
  Gray mist across your candlelight,
We stir, we shake you to the heart;
  And then are gone into the night.

Out in your orchards in the sun,
  You count the rosy harvests nigh;
A gasping few, and one by one,
  Without the walls we pass you by.

Thin laughter dwindles down the grass;
  You jeer, though scarce you know at what;
You point gross fingers where we pass;
  The dust dies out; we are forgot.

We come and go; we come again;
  Nor loaf, nor cloak your dole, nor shed
Wherein to house us from the rain;
  Nor of one bough the apples red.

A hundred towns to east, to west,
  Scatter our ashes to the wind;
Ever we speed upon the quest;
  Ever the Hunters ride behind.

Thin laughter, cackle or grow still;
  Cold doors, unbar or shut us out;
We are of them that do God's will;
  The Hunt shall end in wreck and rout!

THE YOUNG MOTHER

The Host lifts high the candlelight—
"Out in the dark who waits before?
Now who is this at mid of night,
Comes faring to my door?"

With rushes is the chamber set;
The house is sweet without, within;
For it may be she will forget
The place where she hath been.

But lonely, lonely in the room,
With strange eyes looks she all about;
She sees the broken boughs in bloom,
And the red wine poured out.

They crowd around her where she stands,
The children and the elders there;
They put the cup within her hands;
They break the loaf so fair.

Oh, what to her that they are kind!
Oh, let the tears come like a tide!
She cannot keep from out her mind
The son for whom she died!

THE PLOWMAN

The delicate gray trees stand up
  There by the old fenced ways;
One or two are crimson-tipped,
  And soon will start to blaze.

The plowman follows, as of yore,
  Along the furrows cold,
Homeric shape against the boughs;
  Sharp is the air with mold.

The sweating horses heave and strain;
  The crows with thick, high note
Break black across the windless land,
  Fade off and are remote.

Oh, new days, yet long known and old!
  Lo, as we look about,
This immemorial act of faith,
  That takes the heart from doubt!

Kingdoms decay and creeds are not,
  Yet still the plowman goes
Down the spring fields, so he may make
  Ready for him that sows.

THOMAS À KEMPIS

Brother of mine, good monk with cowlèd head,
Walled from that world which thou hast long since fled,
And pacing thy green close beyond the sea,
I send my heart to thee.

Down gust-sweet walks, bordered by lavender,
While eastward, westward, the mad swallows whir,
All afternoon poring thy missal fair,
Serene thou pacest there.

Mixed with the words and fitting like a tune,
Thou hearest distantly the voice of June,
The little, gossiping noises in the grass,
The bees that come and pass.

Fades the long day; the pool behind the hedge
Burns like a rose within the windy sedge;
The lilies ghostlier grow in the dim air;
The convent windows flare.

Yet still thou lingerest; from pastures steep,
Past the barred gate the shepherd drives his sheep;
A nightingale breaks forth, and for a space
Makes sweeter the sweet place.

Then the gray monks by hooded twos and threes
Move chapelward beneath the flaming trees;
Closing thy book, back by the alleys fair
Thou followest to prayer.

Born to these brawling days, this work-sick age,
Oft long I for thy simpler heritage;
A thought of thee is like a breath of bloom
Blown through a noisy room.

For thou art quick, not dead. I picture thee
Forever in that close beyond the sea;
And find, despite this weather's headlong stir,
Peace and a comforter.

RACHEL

No days that dawn can match for her
The days before her house was bare;
Sweet was the whole year with the stir
Of young feet on the stair.

Once was she wealthy with small cares,
And small hands clinging to her knees;
Now is she poor, and, weeping, bears
Her strange, new hours of ease.

LYDIA

Break forth, break forth, O Sudbury town,
  And bid your yards be gay
Up all your gusty streets and down,
  For Lydia comes to-day!

I hear it on the wharves below;
  And if I buy or sell;
The good folk as they churchward go
  Have only this to tell.

My mother, just for love of her,
  Unlocks her bureau drawers;
And sprigs of withered lavender
  Drop down upon the floors.

For Lydia's bed must have the sheet
  Spun out of linen sheer,
And Lydia's room be passing sweet
  With odors of last year.

The violet flags are out once more
In lanes salt with the sea;
The thorn-bush at Saint Martin's door
Grows white for such as she.

So Sudbury, bid your gardens blow,
For Lydia comes to-day;
Of all the words that I do know,
I have but this to say.

ANNE

(*Sudbury Meeting-House*, 1653)

Her eyes be like the violets,
  Ablow in Sudbury lane;
When she doth smile, her face is sweet
  As blossoms after rain;
With grief I think of my gray hairs,
  And wish me young again.

In comes she through the dark old door
  Upon this Sabbath day;
And she doth bring the tender wind
  That sings in bush and tree;
And hints of all the apple boughs
  That kissed her by the way.

Our parson stands up straight and tall,
  For our dear souls to pray,
And of the place where sinners go,
  Some grewsome things doth say;
Now, she is highest Heaven to me;
  So Hell is far away.

Most stiff and still the good folk sit
To hear the sermon through;
But if our God be such a God,
And if these things be true,
Why did He make her then so fair,
And both her eyes so blue?

A flickering light, the sun creeps in,
And finds her sitting there;
And touches soft her lilac gown,
And soft her yellow hair;
I look across to that old pew,
And have both praise and prayer.

Oh, violets in Sudbury lane,
Amid the grasses green,
This maid who stirs ye with her feet
Is far more fair, I ween!
I wonder how my forty years
Look by her sweet sixteen!

GOOD FRIDAY

Peter and James and John,
The sad tale runneth on—
All slept and Thee forgot;
One said he knew Thee not.

Peter and James and John,
The sad tale runneth on—
I am that one, the three;
Thus have I done to Thee.

Under a garden wall,
I lay at evenfall;
I waked. Thou calledst me;
I had not watched with Thee.

Peter and James and John,
The sad tale runneth on—
By the priest's fagot hot,
I said I knew Thee not.

The little maid spake out:
"With Him thou wentest about."
"This Man I never met—"
I hear the cock crow yet.

A CHRISTMAS FOLK-SONG

The little Jesus came to town;
The wind blew up, the wind blew down;
Out in the street the wind was bold;
Now who would house Him from the cold?

Then opened wide a stable door,
Fair were the rushes on the floor;
The Ox put forth a hornèd head;
"Come, little Lord, here make Thy bed."

Uprose the Sheep were folded near:
"Thou Lamb of God, come, enter here."
He entered there to rush and reed,
Who was the Lamb of God indeed.

The little Jesus came to town;
With ox and sheep He laid Him down;
Peace to the byre, peace to the fold,
For that they housed Him from the cold!

ON A COLONIAL PICTURE

Out of the dusk stepped down
  Young Beauty on the stair;
What need of April in the town
  When Dolly took the air?

Lilac the color then,
  So all in lilac she;
Her kerchief hid from maids and men
  What was too white to see.

Good Stuart folk her kin,
  And bred in Essex vales;
One looked her happy eyes within,
  And heard the nightingales.

When Dolly took the air,
  Each lad that happened near,
Forgetting all save she was fair,
  Turned English cavalier.

It was the end of Lent,
The crocus lit the square;
With wavering green the bough was bent
When Dolly took the air.

Long since that weather sped,
Yet yonder on the wall
Her portrait holds a faded shred,
Some scrap of it in thrall.

The New World claims the skies,
Although the Old prevails;
We look into her happy eyes
And hear the nightingales.

Staid lilac is her gown,
And yellow gleams her hair;
The ghost of April is in town,
And Dolly takes the air!

WHEN MARTIN PLAYS UPON THE FLUTE

When Martin plays upon the flute,
He is a shepherd. Deep
Within the half-lit hills he goes
To seek for his lost sheep.

His staff is made of gentle stuff,
From some place very far;
Across the shadowy, narrow grass
His cloak gleams like a star.

So clear, so clear that call of his
To house from dark and cold,
Not any straggler of them all
Can keep back from that fold.

V

AT DUSK

"Starlit gardens grey with dew."
—HENLEY.

A HAUNTING MEMORY

Wild rockets blew along the lane;
  The tall white gentians too were there;
The mullein stalks were brave again;
  Of blossoms was the bramble bare;
    And toward the pasture bars below
    The cows went by me, tinkling slow.

Straight through the sunset flew a thrush,
  And sang the only song he knew,
Perched on a ripening elder bush;
  (Oh, but to give his song its due!)
    Sang it, and ceased, and left it there
    To haunt bush, blade, and golden air.

Oh, but to make it plain to you!
  My words were wrought for grosser stuff;
To give that lonely tune its due,
  Never a word is sweet enough;
    A thing to think on when it was past,
    As is the first rose or the last.

The lad, driving his cows along,
  Strode whistling through the windy grass;
The little pool the shrubs among
  Lay like a bit of yellow glass;
    A window in the farmhouse old,
    Turned westward, was of glaring gold.

I have forgotten days and days,
  And much well worth the holding fast;
Yet not the look of those green ways,
  The bramble with its bloom long past,
    The tinkling cows, the scent, the hush—
    Still on the elder sings that thrush.

THE HOUSE OF THE SILENT YEARS

The Silent House it standeth wide,—
Yea, open is the door;
The winds of Peace from every side
Blow round it evermore.

Unhewn of axe, unmade of hands,
Its walls so broad and still;
Like to a sea the pale gray lands
Flow up to the gray sill.

Candle were vain, and sun but dim,
For here the dark doth cease;
Nor drink nor meat is spread for him
Who suppeth here with Peace.

Arrows speed not, nor hurtling spear,
Nor plague cometh to slay;
Viol and rebec make no cheer,
For Song hath had his day.

Grief shattereth here his weary cup;
No watch the hours do keep
That they may call the red East up,
Or soothe the West to sleep.

Fashions, desires, dreams, swarming fears,
Fade past the threshold gray;
One day is as a thousand years,
A thousand years one day.

LYDIA IS GONE THIS MANY A YEAR

Lydia is gone this many a year,
  Yet when the lilacs stir,
In the old gardens far or near,
  The house is full of her.

They climb the twisted chamber stair;
  Her picture haunts the room;
On the carved shelf beneath it there,
  They heap the purple bloom.

A ghost so long has Lydia been,
  Her cloak upon the wall,
Broidered, and gilt, and faded green,
  Seems not her cloak at all.

The book, the box on mantel laid,
  The shells in a pale row,
Are those of some dim little maid,
  A thousand years ago.

And yet the house is full of her;
She goes and comes again;
And longings thrill, and memories stir,
Like lilacs in the rain.

Out in their yards the neighbors walk,
Among the blossoms tall;
Of Anne, of Phyllis, do they talk,
Of Lydia not at all.

HOMESICK

(*On a Rainy Day*)

Oh, tell me not of any mirth;
I know them all by heart—
Fond laughter wavering by the hearth
Shrill songs of field and cart.

Oh, tell me not of any grief,
For I do know them all—
Slim, empty chambers, wane of leaf,
And tears, tears that befall.

Oh, tell me not of beauty's glass,
I know it through and through;
Old loves, each flower within the grass,
Is fashioned like to you.

Jest, weeping, daring beauty, too,
Starlight and jocund dawn;
I learned them every one from you,
That now are lost and gone.

Old loves, old house worn dear and thin,
One thing is left of all;—
I hear the little rains begin
Along the orchard wall.

THE ROOM

'Towns, lovers, quarrels, bloom—
All change from day to day,
But not that stedfast room,
Far and far away.

'The stiff chairs ranged around,
The blue jar flowered wide,
'The quick, close, racing sound
Of poplar trees outside—

I daresay all are there;
There still two pictures keep—
'The girl so tall and fair;
Christ with His foolish sheep.

IN MEMORIAM

The long day sped;
A roof; a bed;
No years;
No tears.

A WHITE LILAC

I know you ghost of some lone, delicate hour,
  Long-gone but unforgot;
Wherein I had for guerdon and for dower
  That one thing I have not.

Unplucked I leave your mystical white feather,
  O phantom up the lane;
For back may come that spent and lovely weather,
  And I be glad again!

TELLING THE BEES

(*A Colonial Custom*)

Bathsheba came out to the sun,
Out to our wallèd cherry-trees;
The tears adown her cheek did run,
Bathsheba standing in the sun,
Telling the bees.

My mother had that moment died;
Unknowing, sped I to the trees,
And plucked Bathsheba's hand aside;
Then caught the name that there she cried
Telling the bees.

Her look I never can forget,
I that held sobbing to her knees;
The cherry-boughs above us met;
I think I see Bathsheba yet
Telling the bees.

IN TIME OF GRIEF

Dark, thinned, beside the wall of stone,
The box dripped in the air;
Its odor through my house was blown
Into the chamber there.

Remote and yet distinct the scent,
The sole thing of the kind,
As though one spoke a word half meant
That left a sting behind.

I knew not Grief would go from me,
And naught of it be plain,
Except how keen the box can be
After a fall of rain.

TO-DAY

Is there but emptiness from sky to sky;
A hollow where we pass,
Along the simple grass?
Stirs not some intimate foot as we draw nigh?
Or is To-Day grown but a lantern light,
That throws at the dark's edge,
Upon some village hedge,
A petty red, then dwindles into night?

The House decays, but in the April rain,
Long after, where it stood,
Betwixt the sea and wood,
Purple as yore, its violets remain.
Long after, hoarded in the ancestral town,
The new folk find it there,
In carvèd shelf or chair,
Or candlesticks whose gilt is turning brown.

Thus is it with our Pasts; they go; they stay;
They go, yet leave behind,
Some wealth, dear, starry, kind,
For common folk to gather day by day:
There is no moment which dies unforgot;
For when the last is flown,
The very churls do own,
More wars than Troy, more towers than Camelot.

Yet not alone the vanished years are fair;
There are two spirits keep,
Where men do work or sleep,
Down rutty lane, or in the roof-girt square;
Their looks are gentle, for they come to bless;
With brooding eyes they see,
The Best for you and me;
And one is Awe and one is Loveliness.

From wonder unto wonder do we go;
Faiths, fervors, quests, desires,
Youth's brief entrancing fires,
The deeper moods of deeper years we know;
We need but lift our bare, expectant hands;
The mists break and are gone;

Sounds, scents, visions of dawn
Surge toward us from the old, unalien lands.

The wonder of this life that hurries by!—
Loves, wrecks, deceits, and woes,
Pomps, marketings and shows,
So close to earth, yet closer to the sky.
This you and I—forgetting and forgot;
Yet shall we plan, dream, slay,
Or, sudden on a day,
Grasp at the wheeling suns and perish not.

This mystery forever at the door!—
Familiar as the air,
And sacred as a prayer,
Forever new and yet forever hoar—
This you and I—blown past the village pane,
And down to darkness thrust,
A little simple dust,
That still shall rise and serve its God again.

What go into the making of a song?
A thousand years agone,
And more that are to dawn,
And this one moment pulsing strange and strong;

And every moment, be it near or far,
Joy-lit, or drab with woe,
And every great and low,
The rose, the worm, the tempest, and the star.

The cry of Sorrow gathering her sheaves;
The laughter full and low,
Of the rude folk that sow,
A windy hour under thin country eaves;
The shout of Singers marching in their might,
To viol and to horn,
Far up the steeps of morn,
To the white levels of perpetual light.

First love, that in the young days has us thrall;
The festival; the flower;
The wet, autumnal hour;
The last fight waging by the broken wall—
These, these and more. For hark! all wrong, all right;
The fear that drove men back,
The dream along the track,
The foot that slipped, the heart that took the height!

Oh, wonder of a song! Along it pour
A thousand years to be,
The fair, the rude, the free,
Like wind adown the hollow of a shore:
Out of their hearts shall come a kindlier Plan;
Out of our fathers' creeds,
A better for our needs,
Out of the ancestral throng a nobler Man.

Oh, life! oh, song! Oh, the long awe of spring!
A little shines the light;
Then lo, to left, to right,
Across the garden flags some baffling thing!—
See the round scarlet leap from April clod:
Empty we turn away,
Dared by that bit of clay;
For tulips still are tulips, God still God.

Some ancient sense of Beauty haunts us still;
The pangs of Life and Art,
Lie sharp about the heart;
Sudden we feel the unescapable thrill:

One instant naught—the next, a pageant nigh!
Out in the naked street,
The sound of lonely feet;
In ordered splendor all our dreams march by.

A book can hold us, or a snatch of sea,
Or lilies by a wall;
A comrade at dewfall,
Can from his violin such chords set free,
To such quick, searching notes give instant tongue,
To woods, darks, sailing ships;
The sobs start to our lips—
How long, how long it is since we were young!

He plays. Under the clear and ruddy sky,
And there in the dewfall,
The oldest things of all,
Go gleaming past, and as they go, they cry—
Love, Longing, Tears, and gray Remembering;
A foot, a voice, a face!—
And there, in some dim place,
The little honey-colored flowers of spring.

To every age some mystery all its own,
That makes its dullest air,
A something hushed and fair;
Down every age some breath of Beauty blown
Each day is but a pool within the grass,
A haunted, gusty thing,
Of ancient fashioning,
Where earth and heaven do meet as in a glass.

THE CRY OF THE OLD HOUSE

Come back!
My little lads, come back!
My little maids, with starchèd frocks;
My lads, my maids, come back!
The poplar trees are black
Against the keen, lone, throbbing sky;
The tang of the old box
Fills the clear dusk from wall to wall,
And the dews fall.
I watch, I cry:
Leave the rude wharf, the mart;
Come back!
Else shall I break my heart.

Am I forgot;
My days as they were not?—
The warm, sweet, crooning tunes;
The Sunday afternoons,
Wrought but for you;

The larkspurs growing tall,
You wreathed in pink and blue,
Within your prayer-books small;
The cupboards carved both in and out,
With curious, prickly vine,
And smelling far and fine;
The pictures in a row,
Of folk you did not know;
The toys, the games, the shrill, gay rout;
The lanterns, that at hour for bed,
A charmed, but homely red
Went flickering from shed to shed;
The fagots crumbling, spicy, good,
Brought in from the great wood;
The Dark that held you all about;
The grave, white Shapes blown to and fro,
The Wind that would not go!—
Come back, my women and my men,
And take them all again!

Not yet, not yet,
Can you forget—
For you that are a man,
You battle not or reap, you dream nor plan;

And you, so gray of look,
You cannot pluck a rose, or read a book,
Do aught for faith, or fame, or tears,
But I am there with all my years.
Oh, one and all,
When at the evenfall,
Your slim girls sing out on the stair,
Lo, I am there!
When blow the cherry boughs so fair
Athwart your slender town yards far away,
Lo, all at once you have no word to say;
For at your throat a sharp, strange thing—
An old house set in an old spring!

Come back!
Come up the still and wistful lands,
The poplar-haunted lands.
You need not call,
For I shall know,
And light the candles tall,
Set wine and loaf a-row.
Come back!
Unlatch the door,
And fall upon my heart once more.

For I shall comfort you, oh, lad;
Oh, daughter, I shall make you wholly glad!
The wreck, the wrong,
The unavailing throng,
The sting, the smart,
Shall be as they were not,
Forgot, forgot!
Come back,
And fall upon my heart!

BIBLE STORIES

The room was low and small and kind;
  And in its cupboard old,
The shells were set out to my mind;
  The cups I loved with rims of gold.

Then, with that good gift which she had,
  My mother showed at will,
David, the ruddy Syrian lad,
  With his few sheep upon a hill;

A shop down a rude country street,
  The chips strewn on the floor,
And faintly keen across the heat;
  The simple kinsfolk at the door;

Mary amid the homely din,
  As slim as violet;
The little Jesus just within,
  About His father's business set.

My mother rose, and then I knew
  As she stood smiling there,
Her gown was of that gentle blue
  Which she had made the Virgin wear.

How far the very chairs were grown!
  The gilt rose on each back,
Into a Syrian rose was blown,
  And not our humble gold and black.

That week long, in our acres old,
  Lad David did I see;
From out our cups with rims of gold,
  The little Jesus supped with me.

DREAMS

Now you are fallen asleep,
And sorrow has let you be,
Too golden a thing to weep,
Dream, if you will, of me.

Dream of an old road set
With many a wild quince tree;
Though all else you forget,
Dream of the spring and me.

IF I COULD MAKE A SONG

If I could make a song,
Dripping with my heart's pain,
As drips a bough down a thin road,
After a cutting rain—

So sad a song, so hushed a song,
So shaken from foot to head—
I would sing it, that am dumb,
To you, that are dead.

EPITAPHS

I

A Nobody

He died of nothing. Life's full cup
He dared but sip, lest it should spill;
Death dashed it down into the dark;
And he is nothing still.

II

Belinda

Call her a rose pressed in this book,
Away from light and gust,
Snatched from Life's brier and from June,
To crumble into dust.

NOCTURNE

Topple the house down, wind;
Break it and tear it, rain;
She is not within,
Nor will come again.

That not even her ghost
Will know it for her own;—
Topple it into dust;
Tear it bone from bone.

VI

NEW POEMS

"And the only tune that he could play"—

—NURSERY RHYMES.

AT DUSK

She who had wit, and so was wise,
Beside an upland church-door lies;
And you and I who have no wit
Are left. Death has the best of it.

This room, being hers, has hoarded well
The glittering things she used to tell;
Now and again from out some crack
The sharp gold of a word drops back.

Then you and I, as we look up,
See in the air as in a cup—
Strange petaling in a tired place—
The flowering oval of her face. . . .

Outdoors, within a misty gust,
The long trees stream across the dust,
In flaring crowds to the world's rim,
Like red cloaks of the cherubim.

APPLES

Before she went from grieving,
To where all grief is done,
She walked amongst the apple trees
That grew in Avalon.

I am not good at naming names;
I am not sure at all,
But that it was in Babylon;
The dusk was at the fall.

And through the dwindling of the light,
And clear unto the town,
Was heard the blunt, rich, huddled sound
Of the apples dropping down.

Her plaintive long hands at her side,
Her head drooped as of old,
She was that dwindling of the light,
And the bough growing cold.

Were I to find those apple-trees,
  Half-lit, crabbed, slim with dew,
In Tarshish or in Nineveh,
  Would I not find her too?

For was not all her loveliness
  Blown dimly down the air,
The slender color of her gown,
  The sweet dark of her hair?

Perhaps. But I am sure of this,
  That clear unto the town,
There will be heard that sound again,
  Of the apples dropping down.

TO ONE WHO DIED YOUNG

Oh, none will ever think of you
  By a few fagots in the cold;
For none will think of you at all
  As tired, alone, and old!

Let others weary, others ache;
  Stumble with burdens; trudge the dust;
Gnaw at each day as at a bone;
  Let others, as they must.

Gay, bold, aflame, you came on Death;
  Took his sharp challenge at a leap;
Oh, lost and loveliest, it was well
  So soon to fall asleep!

ALL HALLOWS NIGHT

Two things I did on Hallows Night:—
Made my house April-clear;
Left open wide my door
To the ghosts of the year.

Then one came in. Across the room
It stood up long and fair—
The ghost that was myself—
And gave me stare for stare.

FORTUNE

I have so little, yet am rich;
I pay my bread with gold
Filched from wild mustard by the road,
As much as I can hold.

I have such plenty, yet am poor;
I pay my roof with tears
Shed for the time when I was young,
And unaware of years.

TO LIFE

Unpetal the flower of me,
And cast it to the gust;
Betray me if you will;
Trample me to dust.

But that I should go bare,
But that I should go free
Of any hurt at all—
Do not this thing to me!

ALL SOULS' NIGHT

As I went out on All Souls' Night,
The wind struck with its fist
At the high trees down Old York Road,
And set them in a twist,

Above the sharp black of a pool,
Like a jagged piece of stone,
And in a moment let them go:
I heard each cracking bone.

And with that sound another sound,
As of a slackening rain,
Of apple-yellow leaves blown out
The corners of the lane.

Some, left behind, a dozen or more,
Kept dribbling through the dust,
With the dry noise of an old mouth
That munches at a crust.

The wind struck at Saint John's old gate;
It fell flat on the grass,
Cut through the middle. Half a moon
Crooked down as through a glass.

The gust ran in where lay the graves
Stretched eastward all about;
It split a score of them in twain,
And drove the Dead Folk out.

SANCTUARY

I have a place where I may go,
And keep myself apart;
Sometime a room within a house;
Sometime within the heart,

Of a long bramble by a wall,
Pink-petaled in the clod;
And there I steep in loveliness,
And hear god call to god.

For loveliness is not in bulk;
A rose may harbor me,—
(A thing in need of lovely things)—
Or a tower by the sea.

LONELINESS

Such old, experienced things they look,
The hollyhocks, mauve, lemon, red,
As they had read in every book,
And theirs the last word to be said.

Back to the house I turn again;
The hearths are strange, the chairs apart.
Poignant with women and with men
That stare and stare me to the heart.

ROMANCE

Sirs, not any trick of yours
Can trap her in a net,
For fools to splutter at, and pass,
And, being fools, forget.

Nor think to flout her; such an one
She sets amongst her foes;
Nor dream to make a merchandise
Of a planet or a rose.

Run to her with a broken heart—
This is her way of old—
To strip the gilt cloak off her back
That one may walk in gold.

Prove yourselves of her house, her blood,
And she will share each thing;
Hereditary fields and stars,
And the silver hounds of Spring.

TRAGIC BOOKS

That I have lived I know; that I
Have loved is quite as plain;
Why read of Lear, a wild old king,
Of Cæsar stabbed in vain?

The bitter fool, the Dover heath,
The stumbling in the grass
I know. I know the windy crowd,
And Rome as in a glass.

Life taught them all. These later days
Are full enough of rain;
I will not weep unless I must,
Or break my heart again.

HIS FIRST LOVE

Can you forego me? Treat me like a thing
More trivial than a flower, and less dear?
Think for a while. Can you forego the spring,
Forfeit the one mad weather of the year?
I press between you and each yesterday;
Smelling of wind, of white brier in the dew,
From the grave's edge, and from the shrill, trodden
way,
I that am ghost, reach to the ghost in you.
Foregoing spring, you thus can forego me,
And bare of me, of spring you shall go bare.
Leave me or choose me. Yet it matters not.
I shall possess you as the root the tree;
Take of your candlelight and loaf my share;
Read in your books, dig in your garden plot.

TO A DEAD FRIEND

To lose a lodging, yet to find the sky
House me more closely than all else I knew,
This did your going for me, friend; for you
Were all my loss, and yet the gainer I.
You forced me to the stars; this being so,
I have you, them, and also the high sun.
Your dreams for me, I dream them every one,
To prove me worth you, and the road I go.
Your nearness baffled me; I went amiss.
A rose across the thin width of a lane,
Is better known than one within the hand;
You see five petals, each sweet that or this.
The distance now between us makes you plain,
And your whole loveliness I understand.

QUESTIONING

Can one tear dreams in two, as though each were
A flower to unpetal, let it go
To the next wind, for a small while to stir
In a small pomp, and be dispersed? I know
A flower can so be dealt with—but a dream?
Yes, to a crocus this can well be done,
Or to a ship, a grave. Yet still a dream
Outwears the earth, outlives the racing sun.
Oh, by a dream, I am grown different;
A fairer thing for any house to hold;
Part of the texture of the common lot;
Higher than griefs or spheres by what I spent;
By what I lost, beyond all growing old;—
The dream that you were true, though you were not.

YOU HAVE BEEN GONE SO LONG

You have been gone so long—that you were gay,
That you were gay, and round, and a young thing,
I half forget, and so have made you stay
With those struck out of all remembering—
The crumbled wharf, tall potentates, the sheep
And their grave shepherd on a shadowy hill,
High in the thyme, and stumbled into sleep.
But you were different; so are you still.
Set in the tulips at my tired door,
A scarlet one against your lips, to blow
Sweet girls about you with a slip of song,
That sighs and breaks, and has no heart for more,
So are you now, and ever shall be so:
My dear, my dear, forgive me for the wrong.

REPARATION

(*In Autumn*)

So sharp a tooth has gnawed their gold,
Eaten it in holes from foot to crown,
The wayside bough hangs a dulled brown,
And the stooped garden's looks are cold.

Is the old robbery not done?
Must they who live by what is fair,
Go hungry for it, and go bare
Down a pale, disillusioned sun?

As in a glass, we see and learn
Darkly. No tooth, in bough and mould
Can gnaw their secret, other gold;
Something escapes, that will return.

For what is fair is permanent,
And nought can rob us of our right.
Shall we not watch the road blow white,
And the blue hyacinth choke in scent?

IN WINTER

I dig amongst the roots of life,
And hear the rushing of the sap
That soon in silken white will wrap
The sagged pear bough. I hear the strife

Of change with change: of riot that goes
Rebellious; last, of law and pain;
Each battling to restore the lane
Its lost, hereditary rose.

The dwindled hearth, and the spent mould
A double flowering will yield;—
New loveliness for house, for field,
And with it the ghost of the old.

LONELY

Who sits within the house and spins and spins
A web of silence, louder than a sound,
And spinning, stares? The rainy sunset thins
Along the rooms; a bluster of wind pants round
The yard and back again. Its leaves all shed,
Sags the wet lilac hedge, in half-lit airs,
Like strip of long-drenched leather, worn to thread:
Who sits within this house and stares and stares?
Some secret's here. Softly I pace the floor,
For fear that of a sudden it may be known;—
That footsteps may fleet out each hoarded place,
Some strange dark hand come fumbling at the door,
That aged thing, who spins and spins alone,
Rush out upon me with a pale, drowned face!

A FLOWER OF MULLEIN

I am too near, too clear a thing for you,
A flower of mullein in a crack of wall,
The villagers half-see, or not at all,
Part of the weather, like the wind or dew.
You love to pluck the different, and find
Stuff for your joy in cloudy loveliness;
You love to fumble at a door, and guess
At some strange happening that may wait behind.
Yet life is full of tricks, and it is plain,
That men drift back to some worn field or roof,
To grip at comfort in a room, a stair;
To warm themselves at some flower down a lane:
You, too, may long, grown tired of the aloof,
For the sweet surety of the common air.

OLD SAUL

I cannot think of any word
To make it plain to you,
How white a thing the hawthorn bush
That delicately blew

Within a crook of Tinges Lane;
Each May Day there it stood;
And lit a flame of loveliness
For the small neighborhood.

So fragile-white a thing it was,
I cannot make it plain;
Or the sweet fumbling of the bees,
Like the break in a rain.

Old Saul lived near. And this his life:—
To cobble for his bread;
To mourn a tall son lost at sea;
A daughter worse than dead.

And so, in place of all his lack,
He set the hawthorn tree;
Made it his wealth, his mirth, his god,
His Zion to touch and see.

Born English he. Down Tinges Lane
His lad's years came and went;
He saw out there behind his thorn,
A hundred thorns of Kent.

At lovers slipping through the dusk
He shook a lover's head;
Grudged them each flower. It was too white
For any but the dead.

Once on a blurred, wet, silver day
He said to two or three:
"Folks, when I go, pluck yonder bloom
That I may take with me."

But it was winter when he went,
The road wind-drenched and torn;
They laid upon his coffin lid
A wreath made all of thorn.

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